

## Practicing Engagement: A Post-COVID Field Report

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Among the many challenges presented by COVID-19, requirements for sheltering-in-place and social distancing continue to prompt new approaches to community engagement. In the summer of 2020, the University of Hawai'i Community Design Center (UHCDC) conducted two community engagement exercises for two very different projects. The first engaged the University of Hawai'i at Manoa community around the re-envisioning of Varney Circle, a historic campus focal point. The second engaged the rural Wahiawā Town community around the redevelopment of the Wahiawā Civic Center. Both engagement processes reached out to communities of approximately 20,000 people, however, the contrast in constituencies and contexts for engagement shaped distinct approaches and takeaways.

In preparation for these projects, UHCDC began the year with a literature review and synthesis of global community engagement guideline documents and input from local practitioners, which informed the development of an "Engagement Framework for Hawai'i". See Figure 1 for a comparison of different engagement literature and processes. The framework consists of best practices, tools, checklists, and worksheets (easily sharable Google Sheets) that localize global frameworks and aim at meaningful relationships with community members. Due to COVID-19, the framework continued to evolve and expand as the team began to explore synchronous and asynchronous virtual approaches, socially-distanced, face-to-face formats, and combinations of the two. The two projects described below both learned from and informed this framework.

The Varney Circle engagement centered around a virtual "Design Tank," a form of engagement and design inquiry that hybridizes the best properties of a think tank and a design charrette. To inform the work developed in the Design Tank, the team collected campus input through an engagement website with a community survey, whiteboard, and links to related campus design resources. In two weeks, the team gathered 1,094 completed surveys, 45 whiteboard posts, and 11 stakeholder email interviews. The Design Tank then convened four School of Architecture faculty members assisted by two students each to re-envision Varney Circle in a 2-day virtual

design charrette. Overall the Design Tank modelled a quick, low-cost form of community-engaged design research that the stakeholders uniformly felt would be valuable to all major capital improvement projects moving forward.

The Wahiawā Civic Center community engagement process reached out to an underserved rural community over the span of six-months. To respond to issues related to access and equity, the engagement process included multiple forms of outreach in the following order: one-on-one digital talk-stories; a digital engagement site [www.engagewithhawaii.org](http://www.engagewithhawaii.org) using Engagement HQ software to host a community survey, ideas board, community map, and stories board; mailers sent to 14,000 addresses; pre-stamped surveys; survey distribution through a food catering company; in-person pop-up stations at a shopping mall; and an in-person Open House Walk-thru event. See Figure 3 for [engagewithhawaii.org](http://engagewithhawaii.org) website. In alignment with our engagement framework, our process began with a series of digital talk-stories. We talked to 23 community members, elected officials, and other project stakeholders before developing our outreach plan and engagement tools. As a result, the team entered the engagement process with a foundation of community knowledge. This also allowed the team to align and partner with community members and organizations ahead of reaching out to the general public.

The talk-story interviewees made it clear that in-person communication was important to reaching the Wahiawā community, characterized by a large elderly and working poor population. In response, the team developed two in-person engagement methods that followed social distancing recommendations. The team set up a 2-person pop-up station at the Wahiawa Shopping Mall on six different days to distribute information, surveys, and to answer questions. This was followed by a half-day Open House Walk-thru event which invited community members to learn about the project and share their ideas. Attendees engaged a physical model and 10 exhibit and interactive boards spaced 6'-0" apart along a one-way path. This procession ended in an area where participants could talk with agency representatives.

Introduction to Community Engagement	Effective Engagement Building	Community Engagement Guide	Community Engagement	A Short Guide to Community Based Participatory Action	Principle of Community Engagement	5 Steps to Successful Community Engagement and Mobilization	Public Interest Design Practice Guidebook	Hildy Gottlieb's 8-Step Guideline	Community Engagement Framework and Planning Guide	Engaging Community
Dawn N.S. Chang	The Victorian Department of Sustainability and Environment	Tamarack Institute	Community Places	Advancement Project & Healthy City	Department of Health and Human Services	Global Communities	SEED	Published Book, TED Talk	Hume City Council	AJA and the University of Washington
1.1 Outreach and Engagement Agreement	3.1.1 Identify and understand the project system	1 Assess the need for community engagement.	Plan and Design. Identify the purpose and scope of the engagement process.	0 Initial considerations	Know the Community	Plan for the long term	Engaging community participation	Determine the goals of the plan	1 Setting engagement objectives and boundaries	Make time for community engagement.
1.1 Ensure informed decision making	3.1.2 Determine the people in the system	2 Create engagement plan	Develop the level of participation you are hoping to achieve	1 Project design and implementation	Building and Sustaining Networks	Identify community priorities	Identifying critical issues	Plan out who to engage	2 Identify the stakeholders	Values community engagement at the leadership level, and promote it among staff.
2.1 Outreach and Engagement Plan Define Engagement Goals	3.1.3 Review, Reflect, Celebrate	3 Align internally	Identify Stakeholders	2 Partner engagement	Establish Positions and Strategies	Design projects	Defining goals	Develop engagement strategies	3 Determine the level of impact	Be aware of evolving equity metrics do pro bono work, seek funding for community projects.
2.2 Identify potential issues before they become concerns.	3.2.1 Describe what success looks like	4 Create implementation plan	Identify and overcome barriers to engagement.	3 Data collection	Recognize and respect the diversity of the community	Map community priorities and identify community leaders	Research and data collection	Prioritize those activities	4 Select the appropriate engagement methods	Partner with the community in the design process and empower them with decision making.
2.3 Develop a comprehensive administrative record	3.2.2 Select the appropriate suite of tools	5 Adapt (plan once you implement engagement)	Determine the time and resources available for the engagement	4 Data analysis	Mobilizing constituencies and engaging organizations	Hold preliminary meetings with community leaders and ask to mobilize community	Setting benchmarks	Create an implementation plan	5 Timelines and budget	Build time in the project schedule and consider a facilitator.
2.4 Develop a comprehensive communication Plan	3.2.3 Determine scheduling and resources required.	6 Monitor and report back to the community throughout	Define limitations of engagement	5 Report analysis, dissemination, and action	Planning engagement by describing goals and objectives.	Hold community assembly meetings to elect local representatives.	Defining performance measurements	Monitor your progress	6 Reporting back and feedback	Build time in the project schedule, consider a facilitator.
2.5 Begin Kahea - call to action - participation	3.2.4 Manage the risk of engagement.	7 Evaluate the outcomes against your goals	Plan for flexibility	6 Report analysis, dissemination, and action	Implementation and evaluation during the engagement process	Allow the community to prioritize and select impact projects to gain support.	Developing a timeline	Maintain relationships	7 Evaluation and monitoring	Make the community engagement activity, establish rules, listen before designing.
3.1 Engagement: Talk to elected officials.	3.2.5 Review, Reflect, Celebrate	8 Evaluate techniques to measure success	Engagement	7 Report analysis, dissemination, and action	Completion and evaluation of immediate or long term outcomes	Mobilize resource investment	Documenting and reporting results	Evaluation and reflection	8 Conduct post-occupancy evaluations	Know the needs of the community or public organizations
3.1 Engagement: Speak with immediate people affected.	3.3 Evaluate		Evaluate ongoing process and post-completion		Dissemination and reporting	Implement community development project				Educate clients about the values of community engagement
3.2 Talk to kupuna Ask permissions	3.4 Learn		Provide timely feedback to stakeholders		Conclusions in relation to immediate values of stakeholders	Start with a transparent community selection process and share results.				Expose community members to what architects do. Engage with contractors, vendors, businesses. Learn the workings and organizational culture of a nonprofit or civic-partner organization
3.3 Initiate small talk story sessions.										Be philanthropic and advocate for equity
3.4 Independent surveys through a credible firm or telephone surveys if there is a silent majority.										
4.1 First Public Hearing										

Figure 1. Process Comparison Matrix. Image credit UHDC.

	Civic Engagement Platforms										Visual Collaboration Platforms																
	Comment directly on PDF	Integrated Survey	Map-based Commenting	Analytics	Login Required	Forum / Commenting	Project Background Panels	Timeline	File Share	Integrated Social Media	Donations	Idea Voting	Interactive Budgeting	Txt Integration	Incubated Engagement	Language Translation	Upload & View PDF	Upload & View Images	Slide Notes	Presentation Mode	Share with Guests	Share with teams	Graphics & Drawing	Simple Interface	Low Learning Curve	Integration to Google Drive	
Konveio	●	●	●	●	●	●											●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		
Co-Urbanize	●	●	●	●	●	●																					●
Neighborland	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●											●
Mindmixer	●	●		●	●	●			●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●											●
Social Point	●	●		●	●	●						●															●
Citizen Lab	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●											●
Engagement HQ	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●											●
Public Input	●		●	●	●	●		●																			●

Figure 2. Engagement software review. Image credit UHDC.

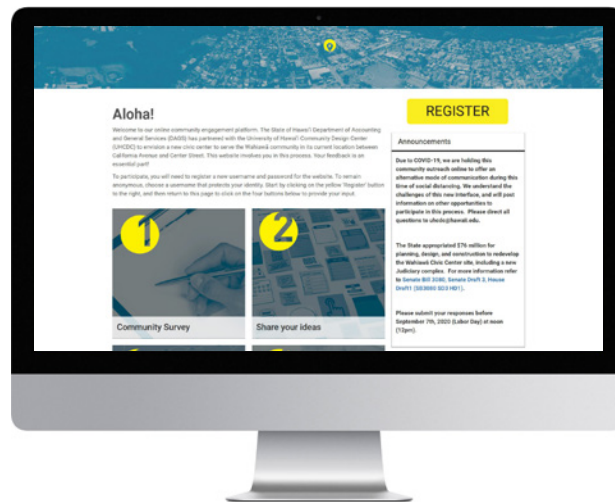


Figure 3. Engagehawaii.org content engagement site using Engagement HQ software Image credit UHDC.

Our Wahiawā Civic Center engagement assessment offers the following metrics: the digital engagement site gathered 98 survey responses, 28 ideas, 67 map pins, and 3 stories. The team worked diligently to code and process the open-ended survey question responses. The rest of the responses were attractively visualized by the Engagement HQ software, a nice perk of the program. The in-person Open House Walk-thru drew 78 participants over 7 hours to collect 164 points of feedback. At first glance, the digital and in-person engagement methods did not lead to any increase or decrease in typical participation rates. However, access to the event and to government representatives, was potentially increased. The Open House Walk-thru allowed residents to attend at their own convenience, any time between 11 am to 6 pm. Residents interacted with the exhibit boards at their leisure, and had the ability to have more intimate and lengthy conversations with agency representatives in the lawn as they left. Many residents made use of this opportunity. While we have not collected information on our attendee's experiences, it would be a valuable next step to gather their thoughts on this new format. See Figures 4, 5, 6, 7 for images of the Open House Walk-thru event and exhibit boards.

As we move toward the end of 2020 there are now resources like "Community Engagement During the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond: A Guide for Community-Based Organizations" put out by the Urban Institute in September. These resources did not exist when our team recalibrated our engagement in March, when the rapid transition to virtual media caught everyone by surprise. However, through both of these project experiences, we learned a great deal about how best to use these new tools for engagement along with ways to improve

in-person interactions. First, the new tools allowed us to reach out to different groups within the community by offering multiple options for engagement. This increased the diversity of voices included in these processes. Most importantly, we learned that in-person interactions, conducted safely, may be the best way to address persistent access issues related to the digital divide.

Finally, from an educator's perspective, increased engagement mediums offer new efficiencies that support community-engaged teaching. Virtual engagement eliminates the need to secure a physical and accessible location, transport materials, set-up, take-down, and provide food and drinks for large groups, which is a time and financial burden for faculty members and students. Likewise, socially-distanced engagement reduces the need for crowd control and mediation, offering a process more manageable for students who are only starting to build their communication and facilitation skillsets. Perhaps as another silver lining, these new methodologies and changing conditions will lead to increased community engagement in our curricula, and more equity-focused work by our students.

#### ENDNOTES

1. Talk-story is a local colloquial term used to describe catching-up or "shoot-ing the breeze."
2. Martha Fedorowicz, Olivia Arena, Kimberly Burrows, "Community Engagement during the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond: A Guide for Community-Based Organizations," (Urban Institute, September 2020) <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/102820/community-engagement-during-the-covid-19-pandemic-and-beyond.pdf> Add a link followed by a period after paper number(s) for online sources.



Figure 4. Open House Image credit UHDC.



Figure 5. Open House Walk-thru Image credit UHDC.



Figure 6. Participants photographing the exhibit boards. Image credit UHDC.



Figure 7. Open House Walk-thru boards. Image credit UHDC.